

CORRECTION AND CLARIFICATION

July 10, 1996 (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org) -

On June 29 we issued an article entitled "JOHN PAUL II HONORS PERSECUTING POPE." In reply to letters we have received in this connection we want to make the following statements:

1. In this article we connected Pope Leo III and Pope Sergius II with the Grecian persecution of Paulicians. This is an error. It is not correct to directly tie the Roman Popes with these particular persecutions, which were carried out by the authority of the Grecian emperors and empresses. I should emphasize, though, that the Popes were frequently in the business of persecuting Bible believers, and the Popes were involved later against descendants of the Paulicians [called by other names, such as Albigenses] who were scattered by these persecutions, some of them coming into Italy and into other parts of Europe.

2. Some have claimed that we are wrong in labeling the Paulicians as Bible believers because they were Manicheans who denied the Old and New Testaments, who worshipped a dual form of god, and who held other Gnostic principles. This is a false charge which was slanderously made by persecutors of that day and which has been repeated by some modern historians. It is probable that some who were labeled Paulicians were truly influenced by Manicheanism, but it is false to label all Paulicians as Manicheans or Gnostics. The following overview of these people is based on many distinguished church histories:

In roughly A.D. 660, a young Armenian named Constantine Sylvanus received a gift of the Four Gospels and the fourteen Epistles of Paul. Constantine, we are told, prized these new treasures and made these Scriptures the rule of his faith. It is probable that the name "Paulicians" was derived from the love Constantine and his fellow Christians had for the Apostle Paul and for apostolic doctrine. Regardless of the exact origin of their name, it is a fact of history, acknowledged by their enemies, that the Paulicians attempted to found their Christianity strictly upon the Bible. Faber tells us that Constantine's shortened New Testament later included the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles of James and Jude, and the Three Epistles of John. All of these were "free from all interpolation and erasure and corruption, in the precise words of the genuine copies used by the whole Church Catholic" (George Faber, *The History of the Ancient Vallenses and Albigenses*. 1838, pp. 50,51). Orchard tells us that the Paulician churches "were formed as much upon the plan and model of the apostolic churches as it was in their power to bring them" (*History of Baptists*, 1855, p. 132). Armitage testifies, "As best they could, they were trying to get at the Bible, and to follow its light" (*A History of the Baptists*, I, 1890, p. 239). For this they were hated by those who had thrown off biblical restraint. Persecutions were soon poured out upon these Bible believers. "The Paulicians were sentenced to be capitally punished, and THEIR BOOKS, WHEREVER FOUND, TO BE COMMITTED TO THE FLAMES, and further, that if any person was found to have secreted them, he was to

be put to death, and his goods confiscated" (Orchard, p. 134). Constantine was stoned to death in 690 for his love for the Word of God. The man who oversaw the stoning of Constantine was named Simeon. He was later converted, became the leader of this people in the place of Constantine, and "finally submitted himself to the flames rather than abandon the faith which, by a sacrifice of all his worldly goods and prospects, he had embraced" (Faber, p. 60). Another leader of the Paulicians, Sergius, was cut into two pieces with an ax. In those days an entire group of Paulicians was burned to death in one enormous funeral-pile (Faber, p. 47). The persecutions began during the life of Constantine and continued through the centuries following.

The persecutions which were poured out upon these Bible-believing people beginning in the 7th century caused them to be scattered throughout Europe, everywhere carrying with them the New Testament faith. The Lutheran historian Mosheim, writing in the 17th century, says: "From Italy the Paulicians sent colonies into almost all the other provinces of Europe, and formed gradually a considerable number of religious assemblies, who adhered to their doctrine, and who realized every opposition and indignity from the popes." They were later known by many names, including Paterini, Cathari, Bulgarians, Patarins, Gazarians, Turlupins, Runcarians, and Albigenses. "Many historians, besides Gibbon, such as Muratori and Mosheim, regard the Paulicians as the forerunners of the Albigenses, and, in fact, as the same people. The term "Albigenses" probably derived from a Council which was held in the year 1176 at the town of Lombers near Albi, "for the purpose of examining certain reputed heretics" (Faber, p. 221). One of the latest of these is Professor Conybeare, one of the highest authorities in the world on Paulician matters" (Christian, I, p. 53).

Though the Paulicians were charged by their persecutors with following the unscriptural doctrines of Manicheanism, many faithful historians have proven that this was not the case, that their "heresy" was in cleaving to Scripture alone and in rejecting human tradition. The Grecian and Roman authorities made every effort to destroy the witness of these separated Christians, and to keep the New Testament Scriptures from the people. The power of this separated Christian movement was in the Scriptures and in the sound teaching which was derived from the Scriptures, and the apostate church attempted to destroy the books and manuscripts which provided this power. They accomplished their wicked deed so effectively that we do not have the actual writings of the Paulicians. What we know of them, we know largely by the mouth of those who hated them. The following is an overview of this subject by Thomas Armitage:

"Paulician history has come to us mainly through the persecutors of the Paulicians, and it scarcely has its parallel for calumny in the annals of the centuries. They have always been coupled with the Manicheans, and nothing has been too base to say of them. Bossuet and Bowers have distinguished themselves in this calumny, but Bowers has been effectually answered by the learned Lardner. ...[Bossuet] confounded the Paulicians with the Manicheans, principally because he implicitly trusted their two enemies, Photius and Siculus, the authors who have sent their names down from the ninth century on a tide of acrid invective. Arnold of Germany, Beausobre and Lardner have honored themselves and the subject with sedate

investigation and judicial candor, and have set right many of the inconsistencies and contradictions of Photius and Siculus.

"Photius possessed great ability, but he was an interested party in his own evidence, and we may fairly question how far he is entitled to absolute credence. As Patriarch of Constantinople, no one was more interested than he in crushing the Paulicians. ... In five days he hurried himself through the five necessary orders, to become Patriarch on the sixth day, thrusting himself into the place of Ignatius, son of Michael I., a man of blameless character, who was deposed because he refused to put the Empress out of the way of plotting Bardas by forcing her into a nunnery. But Pope Nicholas I., by the advice of a synod held at Rome, deposed Photius as an usurper, A.D. 862. In turn, Photius excommunicated the pope, but Gass says that another synod deposed Photius in 867 as 'a liar, adulterer, parricide and heretic.' He was restored to the patriarchate on the death of Ignatius, but was degraded and banished by the Emperor Leo in 886 for political intrigue and embezzlement of the public money. This is the chief witness on whose word the Paulicians are condemned. ...

"THE PAULICIANS THEMSELVES CERTAINLY SHOULD HAVE KNOWN WHAT THEY WERE, AND BOTH THESE WITNESSES EXPLICITLY STATE THAT THEY REPELLED THIS CHARGE WITH GREAT SPIRIT. But what difference did that make with these maligners? So long as they could befoul their fame by that odious brand, they pinned the charge to them as if it were true. Gibbon states that the Paulicians disclaimed 'the theology of Manes, and the authors of the kindred heresies, and the thirty generations, or aeons, which had been created by the fruitful fancy of Valentine. The Paulicians sincerely condemned the memory and the opinions of the Manichean sect, and complained of the injustice which impressed that invidious name on the simple votaries of St. Paul and of Christ.' All through, these witnesses judged them by a false standard of their own raising, while the Paulicians are allowed no counter evidence nor cross-examination, nothing but denial and protest. ... There were different classes of Manicheans as well as Paulicians, but Photius and Siculus lump them en masse and convict themselves again and again of misrepresentation in matters of public notoriety. ...

"As best they could, [the Paulicians] were trying to get at the Bible and to follow its light" (Armitage, A History of the Baptists, 1890, I, pp. 234-239).